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Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Tuesday 18 April 2006

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Organization

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mardi 18 avril 2006

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Organisation

Chair: Cameron Jackson
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Cameron Jackson
Greffier : Katch Koch

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 18 April 2006

Mardi 18 avril 2006

The committee met at 1600 in room 151.

APPOINTMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE

The Chair (Mr. Cameron Jackson): I would like to call to order the standing committee on estimates and welcome all members. The committee, in accordance with our standing orders, is here to consider the estimates for the 2006-07 budget year.

We have a couple of housekeeping matters. We have had the departure and the promotion to cabinet of Ms. Di Cocco. She goes with our congratulations and—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): And best wishes.

The Chair: And best wishes. If you miss her that much, you might even want to select her ministry, but I leave that up to your own imagination. With her couple of years of yeoman service on this committee, I'm sure she's not anxious to come back all that quickly.

Having said that, we do require a replacement for the governing party on the subcommittee of this committee. May I have a motion?

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I move that a subcommittee on committee business be appointed to meet from time to time at the call of the Chair, or at the request of any member thereof, to consider and report to the committee on the business of the committee;

That the presence of all members of the subcommittee is necessary to constitute a meeting; and

That the subcommittee be composed of the following members: the Chair as Chair; Mr. Garfield Dunlop, Ms. Andrea Horwath and Mr. John Wilkinson; and that substitution be permitted on the subcommittee.

The Chair: Do I have a seconder?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'll second that.

The Chair: Any discussion? Seeing none, I will call the vote. All those in favour? Opposed, if any? That motion is carried.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair: Now to the main business at hand. As you know, the standing orders require that we can choose no fewer than six and not more than 12 ministries and/or offices as set out in the estimates that were tabled in the House last week.

There will be two rounds of selections. According to the standing orders, the official opposition will pick the first two ministries, followed by the NDP picking two, followed by the government, and that rotation will repeat itself.

Members, when they make their nominations, if they would indicate the amount of time they wish to allocate to each ministry. In any given round, it must not exceed 15 hours, but we leave it up to your discretion as to how many hours you apply to one or two ministries. Are there any questions about the process?

Mr. Kormos: I understand what you've described now. What's the total amount of time allocated to the estimates?

The Chair: The total amount varies depending on two factors: One, the standing orders say we must report by the third Thursday of November; and secondly, the House leaders may agree to allow us to sit during the intersession, which has happened; it did last year. But the standing orders limit us to a maximum of 12 ministries. So today, we will select 12 in the hopes that we get all 12 done, and if we don't, then we will still report to the House.

Mr. Kormos: Is there amendment of the amount of time that's been allocated or elected with each proposal, obviously for the purpose of accommodating all of the selections, midway through the process?

The Chair: No. The process is a lock. Once this committee approves it, it goes to the House. It would be my intention to report to the House tomorrow on your behalf, and then the allocation will be locked in terms of the order in which we review ministries and the amount of time allocated. Both elements have to be contained in our report from today. That, frankly, is helpful to the ministers who have to schedule their time around when we think we'll be approximately calling them forward. We do wish them to be here, and a managed schedule like that does help.

Any further questions?

Mr. Dunlop: A quick question: In one of the rounds, when you're allowed a total of 15 hours, are you allowed more than two ministries?

The Chair: No. It is a maximum of two ministries in any given round.

Mr. Dunlop: Okay.

Mr. Kormos: But that didn't answer, with respect. Mr. Dunlop is wanting it to be clear that you can elect up to 15 hours for each of the ministries.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Dunlop: A total of 15 hours maximum, two ministries in that time?

The Chair: A maximum of two. You can have one ministry for 15 hours or you can have two ministries combined for up to 15 hours.

Mr. Kormos: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate your patience with me. I'm new at this.

The Chair: Well, Mr. Wilson, you've done very well with your questions.

Mr. Kormos: Thank you kindly.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Mr. Dunlop: Mr. Wilson?

The Chair: He's sitting in Jim Wilson's seat.

Mr. Kormos: If Wilson catches me, Lord knows what he will do.

The Chair: Mr. Kormos, I've never seen you move so far to the right the entire time I have known you.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): Or Mr. Dunlop so far to the left.

The Chair: Yes, or Mr. Dunlop so far to the left.

Are there any further questions? Seeing no further questions, then in accordance with the plan here, the clerk will be pleased to receive your first nominations in round 1. Mr. Dunlop?

Mr. Dunlop: The Tory caucus would like, in the first round, a total of 15 hours: the Ministry of Education for nine hours and the Ministry of Community and Social Services for six hours.

The Chair: Is that clear? No questions? Thank you.

Mr. Kormos, you have round 2.

Mr. Kormos: The Ministry of Finance for eight hours, the Ministry of Health for seven, please.

The Chair: That's clear to everyone? Who will present the government's nominations?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): We will call the Ministry of Health Promotion and the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs. We'll split the time equally between the two ministries.

Mr. Kormos: How does Hansard record a [snicker]?

The Chair: It doesn't, Mr. Kormos.

No questions about those? Mr. Dunlop, your next selections?

Mr. Dunlop: The Ministry of the Environment for seven and a half hours and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for seven and a half hours.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Kormos, you're dying to give me your two selections.

Mr. Kormos: Can you tell me again what were the two selections of the government for a total of 15 hours?

The Chair: I believe we're summoning the Minister of Health Promotion and sport for seven and a half hours. You wanted sport as well?

Mr. Wilkinson: I do.

The Chair: Oh, good. And intergovernmental affairs for seven and a half hours.

Mr. Kormos: I'm writing: intergovernmental affairs for seven and one-half hours. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Now that you're enlightened further, what are your choices?

Mr. Kormos: Please, Chair, energy—would you have doubted it?—for nine hours and municipal affairs for six.

The Chair: Mr. Wilkinson, do you have two more selections?

1610

Mr. Wilkinson: Training, Colleges and Universities for seven and a half hours and Public Infrastructure Renewal for seven and a half hours.

The Chair: Does anyone require that list to be read back to them? Everybody is clear with what that list is?

All those in favour of those selections? Opposed, if any? That is carried.

Shall I report that to the House? All those in favour? Opposed, if any? Carried.

It is our recommendation that we notify the ministries immediately upon the report being tabled in the House and approved, and it would be our intention to begin estimates on Tuesday, April 25. No objection to that?

Mr. Arthurs: Just a quick question: In the event that the House schedule adjusts at all—in my recollection, we recessed last year mid-June as opposed to late June—is the schedule likely to accommodate that?

The Chair: If this schedule in front—do you two have it in front of you?

Mr. Arthurs: We do.

The Chair: The one that is in front of you accommodates both the constituency week and it accommodates what the current government House leader has indicated is his intention, so we're working with the June 21 date. It may not be, but that's the one they communicated to us. We've structured that accordingly.

Mr. Kormos: If I can be of any help, I should indicate that the New Democrats are targeting the statutory calendar period, which is the 21st, 22nd, as the final day of the spring sitting.

I do want to thank you, Chair, and I want to thank members for their patience with me today.

The Chair: All right. We'll instruct our clerk to send out that information.

Are there any other items for the committee? If not, I have one small matter which I want to share with you. It's a matter that was raised last year. It is customary for the ministries to respond in accordance with the standing rules. Unfortunately, our clerk has reported that there has not been a response from the Ministry of Education to the questions that were raised. We're at a loss to understand why. I have a short statement that I'd like to read into the record to put it in proper context, as the Chair, for the committee. I don't necessarily think we need to debate it, but I think I need to share it with you so that you're aware of the concern, because we are going into another estimates and, as you can tell, we've selected education first up. This is the second full year we've not had the ministry—in the eight years I've sat in this chair, I've never, ever had a ministry do this, and I've estimated through two different governments. I just want to put this

on the record, and if there are any short comments, then, by all means.

“As the Chair of the standing committee on estimates, it is my responsibility to ensure that committee members and, in turn, this House, have appropriate access to information when considering the printed estimates of any ministry or office of the government. To this end, the committee has always relied heavily on the co-operation of ministers and their staff to provide timely responses to questions posed during the estimates process. As the committee prepares to consider the 2006-07 printed estimates, I must regrettably inform” in this instance “the members of this committee that the Ministry of Education has failed to respond to any outstanding questions from the 2005-06 estimates process. I’m bringing this to the attention of the members because this is the second consecutive year that the Ministry of Education has not provided responses to outstanding questions by the start

of the next year’s estimates process. It is my hope that the standing committee on estimates will receive the full co-operation of the current Minister of Education in providing any outstanding and future responses to requests for information.”

Signed by the Chair.

I don’t think we want to debate this. I have to put on the record that this is a committee that functions with standing orders that require the co-operation of ministries. I’d rather just leave it at that.

Being no further business—

Mr. Kormos: Chair, in the words of Tony Ruprecht, hasta mañana.

The Chair: You know, my French is really bad.

Do I have a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Dunlop: I’ll move it.

The Chair: All those in favour? Adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1616.

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